Who Are the Virgin Island Five?

"Virgin Island Five" are group of activists accused of murdering eight people in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The murders took place during a turbulent period of rebellion on the Islands.

During the 1970's, as with much of the world, a movement to resist colonial rule began to grow in the U.S. occupied Virgin Islands. From 1971 to 1973, there was a small scale Mau Mau rebellion taking place on the islands. This activity was downplayed by the media, for fear it would damage the tourist industry, which the island's survival depends on.

Then on September 6th, 1972, eight American tourists were gunned down at the Rockefeller-owned golf course on the island of St.Croix. Quickly the colonial authorities picked up over one hundred colonial prisoners. Labeet (Ishmail Ali), Warren Ballantine (Abdul Aziz), Meral (Malik) Smith, Raphael (Kwesi) Joseph, and Beaumont Gereau (Hanif Shabazz Bey) who were apprehended and then charged with the attack. All the men were known supporters of the Virgin Island independence movement.

The five were charged after being subjected to vicious torture, in order to extract confessions. They were beaten, hung from their feet and necks from trees, subject to electric shocks with "cattle prods", had plastic bags tied over their heads and had water forced up their noses by the "defenders of the law."

According to one report, Labeet was given a pocket knife by a guard and was told to run. Labeet knew that if he took one step he would be shot in his tracks. The guards were trying to find any justification to kill Labeet and his fellow Virgin Island Five political prisoners.

The judge (Warren Young) overlooking the case prior to being placed on the federal bench worked as Rockefeller's private attorney and even handled legal matters for the Fountain Valley Golf Course.

"My agitation for the independence for the Virgin Islands was the only crime I was guilty of in the eyes of law enforcement" - Hanif Bey

Eventually, the five went to trial in what became known as the "Fountain Valley" murder trial. This was an obvious Kangaroo Court and a mockery of any sense of a fair trial. On August 13, 1973, each of the five men were convicted and sentenced to eight (8) consecutive life terms.

A look at the incredible conduct of the trial will illustrate to anyone why the men were not only found guilty but that is was impossible for the men to receive a fair trial:

• The court refused to excuse juror member Laura Torres, former wife of detective Jorge Torres, one of the arresting officers.
• Nine jurors testified that during the deliberations they were threatened with F.B.I. investigations on themselves and members of their families, and also threats of prosecution.
• The jury deliberated for nine days, and told the judge that they were "hopelessly deadlocked", yet he still refused to dismiss them and call a mistrial which worked to compel a guilty verdict.
• Four jurors, including the jury foreman, signed statements that they had been forced into a guilty verdict by the judge, police, and F.B.I.. One juror who's daughter was charged with bank robbery several years before, was told that those charges could be brought up again if she did not find the accused guilty.
• The court refused to throw out the "fake confessions", even after it was proven that they were obtained through torture.
• Even the Assistant District Attorney Joel Sacks and several police officers testified and admitted that they knew the defendants had been tortured, and that the "confessions" extracted had been obtained by such methods.

Today, Meral (Malik) Smith, and Hanif Shabazz Bey are currently confined in U.S. prisons. Warren (Aziz) Ballantine has been transferred to a prison facility in the Virgin Islands. Malik Smith and Hanif Bey are being held in prisons on the U.S. mainland. Abdul Aziz is being held in a prison in the Virgin Islands.

On New Year’s Eve in 1984, Ismael Labeet (Ali) was aboard an American Airlines DC-10 en route from St. Croix to a federal penitentiary in Lewisburg, PA. He got permission from the guard to go to the bathroom and emerged moments later with a gun. He directed the plane to alter the route, landing in Havana, Cuba, He got off the plane in Cuba. There has been no confirmed information about his where about since then.

In September 2007, Labeet was again front page news when his half-brother, Shawn Labeet, shot four police officers in...
Free the Virgin Island Five

Write to the Virgin Island Five at:

Malik Smith* #19-1874
*envelope to Meral Smith
Hanif Bey* #19-1952
*envelope to Beaumont Gereau
Abdul Azeez* #19-1878
*envelope to Warren Ballentine
Citrus County Detention Facility
2604 West Woodland Ridge Drive
Lecanto, Florida 34461

Local groups supporting Bill:
NYC Anarchist Black Cross
Post Office Box 110034
Brooklyn, New York 11211
nycabc@riseup.net
nycabc.wordpress.com
facebook.com/nycabc
twitter and instagram @nycabc

New York City Jericho Movement
Post Office Box 670927
Bronx, New York 10467
nycjericho@gmail.com
jerichony.org

YOU CAN HELP BY GIVING POLITICAL PRISONERS A VOICE AND VISIBILITY.